

PRE-LENT SEMINAR  
 Watertown, WI  
 Feb. 8-9, 2015

### Mark 5:21-6:30

**5: 21-24** There is an interval of time between Jesus' arrival and the gathering of the crowd beside the sea; Matthew 9 fills in the events between Jesus' arrival and these two following miracles.

Notice the interesting juxtaposition of the two people who come to Jesus here: one is high and mighty by the standards of his community, the other absolutely nothing by those same standards. But each appears before Jesus in abject poverty of spirit, having nothing of merit to offer him, only the cry of the beggar capable of nothing other than receiving. Death has been called the great equalizer; so too is every appearance before Jesus, be it that of the highly and properly respected pastor, the fallen and now despised sinner, the one too sick to feel either joy or sadness, the Alzheimer's victim whose soul seems already absent.

Notice how Jesus treats each: neither one with contempt, neither one with deference. He receives each one according to their need.

Notice the total submission of this important man. And notice too that Jesus lets him "beseech much." He does not stop him but lets him get it all out, lets him completely humiliate himself. No: "There, there, I understand; no need to go on and on." What does that say about counselling techniques?

Again we see the paradigm, the norm: Despairing circumstances on the outside prove to be great blessings for the inside. How rare it is that those doing well or only in a little trouble turn to Jesus for help on the outside and then rescue on the inside. How little we appreciate our own always total dependence on him even in the ministry when everything is going well. Despair can be a great teacher! Prosperity and success - - rarely. Maybe we are getting somewhere when we catch on in the days that go well how unlikely, how undeserved, how really gracious those days are.

Picture the scene: The noisy nosy crowd shoving and jostling eager to see what will happen next, anxious Jairus perhaps trying to clear a path in front of Jesus to hurry him along. Here is a time for Jesus to show his glory, to win big points with both the common people and officialdom. And then:

**25-29** What a sentence – it's a drama filled 6 lines long (in my Nestle text) before we get to the verb. And once we get to the verb, there is utter simplicity, just 4 words in the independent clause.

12 years! How difficult it is for us to wait 5 minutes before wondering if God has abandoned us. How difficult it is for us to counsel patience to the suffering and their loved ones. How hollow our: "God knows what's best and the best time" may sound in our ears. But this woman still trusts in the power and in the mercy of God in the person of Jesus; that's why she comes to him.

But here is this woman; her physical condition is one of utter impotence - - how she managed to push her way through the crowd is a wonder to us. Her ailment, whatever it was,

sapped not only her physical strength, it destroyed what must have been at least a measure of wealth and then sucked away all religious and apparently societal companionship. No one brings her to Jesus or asks in her behalf. She is destitute and alone.

She just wants to touch his garment. That this is not idle superstition on her part is evident from Jesus' subsequent praising of her faith. It is rather the mark of her (understandable) humility.

In outward circumstance she could not be more different than Jairus; in inner "existential" circumstance there is no difference at all.

Notice the dramatic word: "scourge." That was her perception of her condition and it was an apt word for describing it. Once a scourge is removed, one will surely and certainly notice it!

**30-34** Jesus behavior is as always remarkable! The poor woman's faith has been rewarded richly. Why not just let her go away? Jesus will be no less glorious if this miracle is known only to her. But neither her humiliation nor her exaltation are finished; indeed they are less than half done!

Imagine her panic as she is "found out." She now assumes exactly the same position that had only moments before been the position of Jairus. - - And what is he doing while all this goes on, especially as "she tells [Jesus] ALL the truth," - - the WHOLE story.

Note the patience of Jesus. How tempting it is for us sometimes to cut people off in order to save time - -or to nervously look at our watch. None of that for Jesus! He lets her get it all out. His response on the other hand doesn't drag; it is crisp, short, absolutely beautiful and to the point. Her dread would be removed by that simple line, especially Jesus' first word to her: "DAUGHTER!"

Notice too what is such a commonplace with Jesus that we easily miss it: Jesus praises not what she has/did but what he gave her in the first place. It's really astonishing how Jesus praises faith so much, and then on the last day will praise as well the works that flowed from faith. He credits us with praise in both instances that alone he deserves! And so the saints in heaven always have crowns; but they are always casting down their crowns before him - - he gave the crowns and their glory is real; but we give them back. Nice, *nicht wahr?*

In place of the *scourge* Jesus gives her *peace*: both words contain an objective statement of fact with a subjective effect/affect on the soul. At the risk of allegorizing, doesn't - - shouldn't - - that describe the state of the soul in the Sunday morning Confession and Absolution? The great sinner might have already spent every effort to satisfy his conscience; but Jesus relieves the scourge and gives peace "free for nothing" - he alone bears the cost. Still others altogether comfortable in their outward circumstances, may imagine that peace is cheap and to be had for their own paltry efforts to obtain it - missing the point that it is beyond price for them and attainable only as a gift from him. Always the position of both Jairus and this woman is appropriate: prostrate at the feet of Jesus, awaiting his Word of peace and pardon! And so "... *our soul is restless until it finds its rest in Thee!*" - and so may it ever be!

**35-43** Meanwhile - - back to Jairus. Tragic news! If only he had come to Jesus sooner! If only this woman wouldn't have taken so long! But look: Jairus expresses no such reproaches either to himself or about the woman. The news nevertheless is not without its salutary effect: The crowd hears the news and perhaps in sympathy melts away - - just as Jesus wanted.

It's one thing for everyone to be on hand for a miracle that is verified only by this one little old lady. It's quite another for an ever greater (humanly speaking) miracle to be seen by one and all and that at the house of such an important man. So for the little miracle, Jesus doesn't

mind witnesses; for the big miracle he wants only enough witnesses to make the point to faith that he is indeed the Lord of life and death. So let everyone see the crucifixion and no one see the resurrection. Let everyone notice Paul's weakness and few recognize that his work saved so many. Write an article for *Forward in Christ* about your ministry. What will be its focus? In your own mind consider the great successes and the total failures. We will not be ungrateful for the former nor seek out the latter; *aber doch ...?*

Jesus' words to Jairus when the messengers come from his house and his words at the house "The child is not dead but only sleeping" beautifully match and fit together. It is the nature of Jesus' words to contradict everyone else's and our own sight and reasoning. It is the nature of Jesus' words to bid us abandon every word and thought but his own. (*There it is again: sich verlassen auf!*) That can only provoke laughter in the world, a world which has reason to weep but whose weeping so quickly changes to ridiculing laughter when the one and only solution to its weeping appears on the scene. But nevertheless the Word creates and preserve faith in the hopeless situation. - - So, let's not act ever as if we need to apologize for it or as if it embarrasses us!

Finally, we can't help but marvel at the utter lack of drama on the one hand and the tenderness of Jesus on the other: "He took her by the hand. 'Don't say anything! Give her something to eat.'"

How rich these miracles are for application! Jesus' patience. Jesus' tenderness. Jesus attention to the least detail. Jesus condescension to not only our need but also to our weakness (Jairus assumes that Jesus has to be there to place his hands on his daughter). Jesus always seeing the end of things from their beginning, when we see no further than the front of our nose, and that in spite of his promises and our own earlier experiences of their fulfillment. As always the contrast between Jesus and us is striking - - and very comforting.

## Chapter 6

**1-6** What a contrast! Notice that now, for his humiliation, he takes along all of the disciples, not just the three witnesses of the great triumph over unbelief and death at the home of Jairus.

Again, as in chapter 5 after the healing of the demon possessed, we note the utter irrationality of unbelief. Though faith takes a miracle, unbelief takes a blatant, utterly wicked refusal to consider the facts. His hearers know of no sin that he ever committed, have nothing to accuse him of. On the contrary they know of his wisdom and mighty works, perhaps had even seen some of the miracles performed elsewhere. But in spite of all that they are in the process of being ensnared (note the imperfect verb form) by their own irrationality. Notice that their focus is not at all on the message, but only on externals. But even those should have cheered them. They certainly cheer us!

Luke (4:20-27) gives us fuller account of Jesus' sermon that day. In it as always Jesus speaks the truth in love, a speaking which lovingly seeks the lost by a refusal to soft-peddle the truth of either the law or the gospel, both of which rub people the wrong way. Does that suggest to us evangelism techniques that need careful thought?

Many were rubbed the wrong way, and they set the tone for the day. The ones who thought otherwise were silent. It's interesting that Jesus' remarks are directed only at those who rejected him; he says nothing about the few. But listen to those remarks. Could his very use of proverbial expressions to account for their unbelief be a subtle encouragement to the few who

were nevertheless too weak to step forward and argue with the majority? Could he be suggesting to them: “Don’t be astonished or ensnared by the unbelief of your neighbors and relatives - - it’s to be expected.”

Because of that unbelief of the many, he could not do many miracles there - - few wanted his help or came to ask for it. But still a few did. Notice the compassion of Jesus again: He didn’t just leave Nazareth in a huff. He stayed long enough for the few to come and find him; their circumstances overcame their neighbors’ rejection. But it didn’t overcome it enough for them to speak out boldly in defense of Jesus - - nevertheless he helped them. What patience! What love! What comfort for us, yes, and encouragement for us to trust the power of the gospel when all the evidence suggests that it’s a waste of time to share it in this place or that, with these people or those. Yes, and it’s a reminder too: Not everyone who has benefited most from our faithful service will think it necessary to defend and support us - - as always, Jesus bids us think not of our own welfare but of his glory and the welfare of the flock. *Think of the German policemen in the DDR*. Think of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. And so Jesus preaches in Nazareth, knowing full well what awaits him there, preaches as Ezekiel was told to preach, “whether they will listen or not.”

Still it surprises us that he expresses surprise over the self-ensnaring of the many, just as he expressed surprise over the faith of the centurion. What a strange thing this whole matter of faith and unbelief is. The one is caused by his own powerful gospel; the other by man’s own powerful resistance. And the Son of God is surprised.

While sticking with the theme of his surprise, we might want to ponder who those are who believed and who didn’t, those who have no courage to express their surprising faith and those who do. Think for example of Jesus’ funeral. Who’s there? Who isn’t? It’s worth calling to mind that hymn by Martin Franzmann (*Preach You the Word*, CW, 544) about the seed mindlessly scattered as in Jesus’ parable of the sowing of the seed. The promise in Isaiah 55 remains such a powerful encouragement for us.

Further, consider that those who think they know him best are the ones who end up knowing him not at all. Those who grew (grow) up with him may easily lose their sense of amazement at the gospel they imagine that they know so well. How many of our members does that describe? Does it describe us at times in our preaching and teaching of texts that we have covered a dozen times and know by heart? Preach on John 3:16 some time as though you (and your members) were hearing it for the first time; note already the very first word of the text in Greek, which all by itself bids us be surprised at what follows.

**7-9** Do you catch how odd this whole chapter is its taxis? Jesus has just been rejected by his own. Is this really a good time to be sending out the disciples? Wouldn’t it be better to wait for a time when the gospel appears at least a bit more triumphant? Nevertheless ...

How spoiled we are! They are to trust completely in the absent Christ, that he will so rule over all things that they will be supplied with what is necessary for their assignment (as distinguished from their comfort and convenience!). Not even a backpack (“pouch”), and no second cloak for warmth against a cool night or as a welcome change of clothes. No new staff (answers the objection that Matthew 10:10 seems to forbid even taking any staff) either; the one they have at hand will do. They have one luxury: Two by two. In tough times that will be a comfort indeed; in good times it will provide a necessary check on pride. (Does our long time

together in school and frequent pastoral conferences help serve some of the same purpose long after two by two isn't an option?)

Imagine their excitement - - do you remember yours on Assignment Day? In essence they are to give away more than they had. As always the glory of the office is its pointing away from the occupant to Another whose way it always is to use poverty in the one to give riches to the other - - it's another paradigm for Jesus to us, from the apostles to us (think of Paul in 1 and 2 Corinthians), and from us to those we serve. It's sometimes too easy to get this all backwards.

**10-13** They did as Jesus commanded them and experienced just what he had by implication promised them. He would provide for them through those who received the message and they could leave and go elsewhere (!) when the message was refused; theirs was truly a vicar call, at least as beneficial for them in training as for those they served. But it was temporary; the long term business of dealing with people, the messy business they could avoid and leave for another time when they had had more instruction from Jesus and from life with him.

Still it is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on the horror of the Word leaving a place. In a sermon one might ask: What's the worst thing that could happen to us here in PukunJunction? A fire consuming the town? A flu epidemic? An invasion of heroin peddlers or pedophiles? What's the worst that could happen? This text gives the answer, the answer of Amos 8:11-12. Among the most tragic, the most horrifying words in the Bible are those during Jesus' trials when he kept silent and those warnings in the letters in Rev. 2-3 which threaten the withdrawal of the Word. Think of such under the headings of the three uses of the law, as mirror, curb and guide. It might be well to remind people (be reminded ourselves!) of that when we all too glibly sing "God's Word is our great heritage and will be ours forever!"

The use of olive oil here provokes more questions than it gives answers. The verb for anointing is that used in a medicinal or soothing anointing, not in a ceremony. The same verb is used in James 5. The point is that we do not here have a preview of Extreme Unction. In any event Jesus himself never used oil in this, nor did the apostles after this time as far as we know. Might it be that in this early learning phase the use of the oil gave an easier entrance to the strangers who knew of Jesus but not these men as healers? Could it be that that use as well was a comfortable temporary crutch for the disciples?

**14-29** What a sorry state of affairs! Again its interesting to note the taxis: Just as the disciples are sent out - - and a number of them had been disciples of John earlier - - we have the report of John's humiliating martyrdom. A logical question for the disciples might well have been: *Couldn't Jesus have kept this from happening to one that Jesus himself called the greatest man ever born? And if this happens to John, what might we expect?* As often as the disciples show weakness, they nevertheless also show that faith's fruits are as miraculous as faith itself.

Notice the interesting conscience of this puny tetrarch. It is at once active and at the same time utterly irrational. Jesus must be John raised from the dead - - that he does miracles which the alive John had never done proves it. He is interested enough to listen to other opinions, but he sticks with the opinion that should be the most frightening to him. Nevertheless that opinion moves him to no change in his life. That's an interesting bit of *pastorale*. How often does fear or guilt actually change anyone's behavior? More likely: It can increase the evil by the obsession of the mind/conscience with it, or at the very least only add to the torment. In the end Herod keeps John alive for a mushy assortment of confused reasons - - sometimes fear of God, sometimes fear of the people, sometimes just because he's confused, perhaps sometimes just to stick it to his

wife. Herod's conscience revealed can teach us a lot about those in our own culture who in their confusion act with total unreason over against the gospel, until they have but one option: Deny the existence of conscience. What a host of evils that produces! And while the heathen culture is drowning in its own vice (Romans 1), it hurls accusations at the believer whose life is in good order, accusing him of being an irrational bigot, responsible for all that is wrong in the world.

In sum: Herod's attitude toward John reveals a man who could hear about a different life but could not imagine leaving the one he had behind in order to obtain it.

For the sake of completeness: Herod Antipas is the son of Herod the Great. Herodias is the daughter of Aristobulus, who was a half-brother of Herod Antipas. She married her uncle Philip (also called Herod), a brother of Aristobulus. Philip had been disinherited and lived in a sort of semi-exile with Herodias and Salome in Rome. While visiting Rome or Jerusalem (scholars are divided on the point), Herod Antipas, already married to the daughter of King Aretas, an Ariabian king, took up with Herodias and they eloped. Herod's wife ran home to papa and a war ensued between Aretas and Herod. For a fuller account of this wretched family and the fate of its various miscreants, both Josephus and Edersheim will accommodate the curious.

The "right day" in vs. 21 could refer to the right day for Herodias to carry out her murderous intent or idiomatically to the right day for this extravagant feast, the anniversary of Herod the Great's death and thus the accession day of this Herod, and perhaps his official birthday. Herodian birthday celebrations were famous for their excess and caused the coining of the proverb "a Herodian day" as a synonym for excess.

Herod promises what is not his to promise and then gives what is not his to take.

Again we have to note it: No greater prophet, no more humiliating death - - not for a great confession of faith as a holy martyr, but at the whim of bimbos and at the command of a drunk. Could John ever have conceived the depth of the truth in his confession: He must increase and I must decrease!

**30** Again, the contrast is so striking.

Jesus had kept his implied promise. The disciples were provided for during their vicar experience. And yes, they had a lot to report of how wonderful the experience had been, how rich in teaching and apparently in performing miracles. Jesus listens to all of it. Did he have a smile on his face as they shared with him their successes? He had watched over them, provided them with opportunities, granted success, preserved them from harm. That their joy was justified is beyond doubt. But it needed to be tempered with what Jesus said about joy in his work to the 72 when they returned (Luke 10:18-24).